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AUTHOR Caulley, Darrel N.
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ABSTRACT

Evaluation reports contain many statements which can be termed normative statements. Normative statements say or imply that something is good or bad, better or worse, ought to be or ought not to be. Non-normative statements are statements that are value-neutral, ones that do not express (or are not intended to express) value judgments. Non-normative statements include reports, descriptions, or assertions either true or false used to express matters of empirical or logical fact. Normative as well as non-normative statements can be appraised as true or false. It is important that normative claims be based on factual evidence as well as on valid reasoning. (Author)

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ON THE NATURE OF NORMATIVE STATEMENTS

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Darrel N. Caulley

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

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ON THE NATURE OF NORMATIVE STATEMENTS*

Evaluation reports contain many statements which can be termed normative statements. Normative statements say or imply that something is good or bad, better or worse, ought to be or ought not to be. The recommendations section of an evaluation report typically contains normative statements. The following are some examples of normative statements that might be found in an evaluation report.

Type of Evaluation	Normative Statement
Program	It is recommended that this program should be discontinued.
Program	This program is inefficent.
Product	This product is poorly built.
Product	This product is not safe.
Performance	The students achieved poorly on the tests.
Performance	The performance of the students was outstanding.
Policy	This policy was very effective.
Policy	It is suggested that this policy should be adopted.

Non-normative statements are statements that are value-neutral, ones that do not express (or are not intended to express) value judgments. Non-normative statements include reports, descriptions, or assertions either true or false used to express matters of empirical or logical fact. The following are some examples of non-normative statements.

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*This paper owes much to Facione, P. A., Scherer, D., Attig, T. Values and Society, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1978.

Type of Evaluation	Non-Normative Statement
Program	Title I programs are for disadvantated students.
Program	This program increased students' interest in reading.
Product	At high speeds this product is unstable.
Product	The warranty on this product is one year.
Performance	The mean reading score of the sample of students was 30.6.
Performance	His performance was highly rated by the judges.
Policy	This policy has never been fully implemented.
Policy	The policy has been to encourage the employment of women and minorities

Non-normative statements express judgments about facts, either empirical or conceptual (logical) facts.

Some statements are difficult to categorize as either normative or non-normative. Consider the following examples:

Gerald is lazy.

Brenda is industrious.

At first glance the statements appear to be non-normative in describing how eager some person is to work. However, each says more than that. Gerald is being evaluated lowly, and Brenda is commended. "Lazy" does not simply mean "inclined to do a little". A negative evaluation of that inclination is involved in the meaning of the term. Notice the similar situation with "industrious". A statement that has both descriptive and evaluative components will be considered as a normative statement.

In order to see if the reader has understood the distinction between normative and non-normative statements, select the statements from the

following list which are normative. The answers are given at the end of this paper.

a. Triangles have three sides.

b. Always obey your parents.

c. Violence in children's television should be eliminated.

d. Adultery is a sin.

e. A person shot through the heart will likely die.

f. Murder is wrong.

g. Many people value fair play.

h. Environmental conservation is the responsibility of everyone.

Non-normative statements can be appraised as true or false. They can be used as the premises or conclusions of arguments. To argue in support of a non-normative statement one appeals to empirical and possibly logical information. Normative statements can be appraised as true or false. Normative claims can often be supported by argumentation and appeal to relevant information. Arguments in support of normative statements attempt to demonstrate, in nontrivial and nonfallacious ways, that their normative conclusions are true. Proofs offered in support of statements, either normative or non-normative, are basically arguments; their premises can be listed, they can be examined for logical correctness, their premises can be evaluated as true or false. Consider the following example:

Premises	Racism leads to violence. Violence leads to injury and destruction. Anything that leads to injury and destruction is immoral.
Conclusion	So, racism is immoral.

If a person asserts a normative statement without having any reasons for it, the assertion might be called a matter of opinion. Normative

assertions can be backed by reasons. Thus, we should not assign all normative statements to the category of matters of opinion. It has been my experience that readers of an evaluation report want any normative statements to be backed up by reasoning and evidence; they do not want normative statements to be a matter of opinion.

It is important to know whether a normative assertion is meant to be taken subjectively or objectively. On the objectivist interpretation a normative claim becomes a statement about what in or about X makes it worthy of being preferred independently of the evaluator's actual personal preference of feelings concerning X. There is an expectation that an evaluator's normative statements are to be given an objectivist interpretation. That is, there is an expectation that the evaluator's judgments are not an expression of the evaluator's personal preference or feelings. For example, an evaluator might be called in to make a judgment on whether a program is to be continued or not, in the case where it is a matter of contention whether the program should be continued or not. On the subjectivist interpretation, a normative claim becomes a claim about what is in fact desired or preferred by the evaluator. An evaluator's claims are not expected to be open to a subjectivist interpretation.

When an evaluator makes normative claims, the evaluator should supply reasons why his or her normative claims should be accepted. In presenting normative claims the evaluator should give arguments that support their truth or establish their wisdom. The evaluator should strive to give reasons which would persuade unbiased, informed, rational people that the evaluator's normative positions are, beyond any reasonable doubt, correct. Such reasons are called justifications.

Appeals to emotion aimed at directly bringing about action do not constitute justification. To justify a normative claim is to argue that it should be accepted. To prove a statement true is to argue that it should be believed. It is argued by some philosophers that there is a sense in which a justification can be an appeal to one's feelings. One's sense of fair play or one's conscience are akin to sentiments or emotions. A way of justifying a normative claim might be made by appealing to one's sense of justice. However, this sort of appeal can be distinguished from regular appeals to emotion.

Rationalization does not constitute justification. Choosing first and looking for reasons later constitutes rationalization. In rationalizing one accepts or rejects reasons because they do not support one's predetermined choice. It is easy for an evaluator to fall into the trap of making an evaluative statement and then trying to find reasons to justify it. Facione, Scherer and Attig give an example of rationalization.

> A clear example would be former President Nixon's Watergate cover-up. Motivated by what looks like personal political ambition, he moved to cover the Watergate break-in. Later, when the news came out, he realized he needed a justification. He and his aides met in order to cook up a likely-sounding story, which he hoped they could present as the justification. They invented the "national security" story. They rationalized what they had done. Notice that Nixon not only chose first, he also acted, and only afterwards did he and his aides try to find a normative principle that they could portray as their justification. Acting before seeking reasons, however, is not essential to rationalizing; one is rationalizing when one <u>chooses</u> first, whether one acts before or after seeking reasons.

Providing adequate factual support is often crucial in arguing for a particular normative statement. Failure to provide factual support is a failure to meet minimum requirements when reasoning about normative claims. Normative reasoning commonly involves the evaluation of agents,

actions, or practices in terms of normative principles. For example suppose that an evaluator argues that a program should be discontinued. He should present evidence that the program is ineffective in some way on the basis of the normative principle that ineffective programs should be discontinued.

In seeking to justify a normative claim, appeal is frequently made to the purported consequences. It would be vitally important to support the prediction of consequences with evidential data. For example, an evaluator might make a claim that a certain product is dangerous. The evaluator needs to supply factual evidence supporting the normative claim that the product is dangerous.

Thus far we have argued that it is important to supply factual evidence in support of normative claims. An evaluator can perceive the need for factual support for normative claims, yet fail to supply adequate factual support in defense of normative claims. Factual evidence may be false, irrelevant, or inconclusive. If factual claims in support of normative statements are false, the normative statements are left in the need for support. An evaluator might offer exclusively true factual support in defense of a normative claim, but this factual support might be irrelevant to the claim.

One requirement that exists for the reasoning given for normative claims is the universalizability requirement. This is the demand that the reasoning given for a normative claim about one type of entity should be the same as that given for the normative claim about a similar type of entity. For example, the arguments given in support of the normative judgment about one reading program should be the basis for making a judgment about a similar reading program. That is, similar objects

should be judged by similar standards. This is the universalizability requirement.

This paper has been about the normative claims typically found in evaluation reports. There has been a discussion of the nature of normative claims and they have been distinguished from non-normative claims. Stress has been laid on the fact that normative claims must be based on factual evidence as well as on valid reasoning.

Answers:

The normative statements are: b, c, d, f, h.

References

Facione, P. A. Scherer, D. and Attig, T. Values and society. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978.

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